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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004911

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: A SNAPSHOT OF TURKEY,S SAADET PARTY: LEFT-WING ISLAMISM

Classified By: POLCOUNS John Kunstadter; E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary. Saadet Party is the latest incarnation of Islamist parties formed by political Islam leader Necmettin Erbakan. The party,s members are hardcore Islamists (while not averse to material wealth), but their rhetoric often combines elements of Islamism with a leftwing inspired criticism of West. Temel Karamollaoglu, Saadet,s VP for International Affairs, is an anti-American religious bigot, whose ideas are unfortunately all too common in Saadet. End Summary.

SAADET,S BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCE

2. (U) Saadet (Felicity) Party is an Islamist party ostensibly led by acting chairman Recai Kutan, but actually run by former PM Necmettin Erbakan from behind the scenes. Saadet is the latest incarnation of an Erbakan-controlled Islamist party. Erbakan,s earlier parties --- the Refah (Welfare) Party (1998-2001), the Fazilet (Virtue) Party (1983-1998), and the National Salvation Party (MSP) (1972-1980) --- were all banned by the state. In the summer of 2001, after the banning of the Refah Party, the Islam-oriented political movement in Turkey split in two. One group led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gul formed the Justice and Development Party (AKP). A second group of Erbakan loyalists, however, formed Saadet Party.

3. (U) Saadet remains under the cloud of Erbakan,s past corruption. Erbakan is currently facing the possibility of jail time for a court case involving millions of dollars missing from the banned Refah Party,s coffers.

4. (C) Some inaccurately portray AKP as Refah,s clean, moderate wing and Saadet as the corrupt, radical wing. Although AKP tries to portray itself as a clean and moderate "conservative democratic" party, the party is dominated by hardcore members of the political-Islam National View (Milli Gorus) movement and corruption remains a problem.

5. (C) Saadet received only 2.5 percent of the vote in the November 2002 election and it does not control any seats in the parliament, but its influence is much greater than these numbers would suggest. Saadet sits on governing AKP,s Islamist flank, and AKP,s leadership carefully watches Saadet,s frequent criticism on "Islamist issues" including, for example, criticism that AKP has been effective on removing headscarf restrictions. Newspapers and some contacts routinely speculate that 20-50 AKP MPs will leave the party and join Saadet; but despite defections to center-right parties, no AKP MP has yet defected to Saadet. However, if AKP,s leadership makes a mistake that alienates Islamist voters, a number of AKP,s MPs and grassroots supporters could indeed jump to Saadet.

THE FUTURE OF THE SAADET PARTY LEADERSHIP

6. (C) Although Kutan is loyal to Erbakan, he is weak and ineffectual and there are rumors that he may be replaced this fall at the Saadet Party convention. If Erbakan's legal troubles bar him from the chairmanship, then a number of other candidates will vie for the job. Numan Kurtulus, the former Istanbul Fazilet Party chairman, is a leading candidate. He is popular with party adherents, but may not be loyal enough in Erbakan's eyes to merit the chairmanship. Another possible candidate is Mete Gundogan, Erbakan,s economics advisor. Gundogan is also close to Oguzhan Asilturk, a Saadet ideologue and one of the most influential members of the party. Former Justice Minister Sevkettin Kalkan is another candidate mentioned. He is seen as a representative of the party,s old guard. Former Konya mayor Mustafa Ozkafa and former State Ministers Teoman Riza Guneri and Ahmet Demircan are also mentioned as possible candidates to replace Kutan.

KARAMOLLOGLU,S LEFTWING ISLAMISM

17. (C) POLOFFs met with Temel Karamollaoglu, Saadet's Vice President for International Affairs. Karamollaoglu, who is married to an English woman who converted to Islam, is a controversial figure. He was the mayor of Sivas in July 1993 when a Sunni mob started a fire at a hotel where Alevi (heterodox Muslims) organizations were holding a meeting. Thirty-seven people died in the fire. Karamollaoglu was captured on television several hours before the incident inciting the mob with anti-Alevi rhetoric. He later became a member of parliament and was never prosecuted for his actions.

18. (C) Karamollaoglu's philosophy is a good illustration of the strange mixture of left-wing and Islamic rhetoric common in Saadet. He said Saadet is the party of the National View (Milli Gorus) movement. He claimed that they are not racist, but defenders of human rights, democracy, equality, and world peace. He lamented the unfair distribution of wealth within Turkey and, more generally, within the world. He also criticized the fact that girls are being denied the right of education due to Turkey's requirement that university students not wear headscarves.

19. (C) Saadet Party is not anti-American, Karamollaoglu tried to claim, but it is against the policies of the Bush Administration. Karamollaoglu doesn't like the phrase "war on terror," which he believes President Bush uses as a code word for a war against Muslims. He also claimed that President Bush equates terror with Al Qaida and Al Qaida with Islam. He believes that Secretary of State Rice has decreed that the borders of the Middle East must change as part of the Broader Middle East Initiative. He is, moreover, deeply suspicious of the official US description of the events surrounding 9-11 and told POLOFFs that he suspects Muslims had nothing to do with the attacks.

110. (C) Comment. Karamollaoglu is an anti-American religious bigot, whose ideas are common in Saadet. He thinks that American wealth and power are rooted in selfish exploitation and militarism. He also concludes that President Bush speaks in code words, because that is how Karamollaoglu and other Milli Gorus leaders --- including all Saadet Party members and many members of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) --- communicate with their followers. End Comment.
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